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Jaci Ullrich Honors Portfolio

Jaci Danielle Ullrich
Minnesota State University, Mankato

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Welcome!



Hello, my name is Jaci Ullrich and welcome to my portfolio! I am currently a Senior at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and I plan to graduate this December of 2017 with a major in Biology with an emphasis in Ecology. I am involved in the Honors Program at MSU, and I am also a member of the Protecting Animal Rights Committee, or PARC.

My Mission Statement

I will continually strive to develop my leadership, research, and global citizenship skills while also following my passions, so that I can lead a gratifying and rewarding life and make a positive impact on the world.

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Honors Program



The goal of the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato is to help students develop skills in three main categories including leadership, global citizenship, and research. In order to achieve these three competencies, Honors students participate in classes and activities that further their understanding and experience in these areas. The Honors Program has challenged me in my education and helped to prepare me for my future life beyond college by molding me into a better researcher, leader, and global citizen.

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Leadership

If there was one concept that completely and positively changed the way I perceived leadership, it would be the idea that leadership is a shared operation in which every individual contributes to the team's objective. As a freshmen student, I didn't really see myself as the decisive commander I had previously assumed a leader to be. However, through my various leadership experiences over the last three years, I have formulated a leadership philosophy and can confidently say that I am a competent leader.

During my first semester, I took the [Introduction into Honors](#) course where I first began to cultivate my leadership values. In taking the StrengthsFinder test, I found adaptability, input, consistency, belief, and includer to be my most prominent leadership strengths. My job as a [Student Fundraising Assistant](#) at the Alumni Foundation Center for MSU was another experience that helped me to formulate my idea of leadership. My role there was to speak to friends and alumni of the university to solicit funds for various departments, scholarships, and endowments on campus. Although most of the work was done individually, I was always aware that my participation affected the group as a whole. Through weekly team meetings and frequent friendly competitions, I could see that the contributions of each member of the team were what caused us to achieve our goals. This understanding motivated me to keep doing my best despite recurrent challenges such as dealing with rude prospects or consistently getting no donations.

Through the [Mentor Philosophy](#) class, I learned the importance of building relationships in leadership situations. I believe that knowledge can more readily be passed from a mentor to a mentee when they have developed a bond that includes respect and shared values. This theory was evident when I worked as a [camp counselor and ropes and archery instructor](#) for Camp Robindel. During this role, I became a mentor to the campers and was able to practice and reflect upon my leadership strengths and weaknesses. As a mentor, I formed relationships with the campers by being a positive role model and being someone they can go to when they are feeling homesick or quarreling with another camper. Being a counselor at a live-in summer camp, I was 'on-call' for the seven weeks I was there. My leadership strengths were put to the test each and every day. From comforting a camper who felt left out to entertaining the girls when the rain kept us all indoors, my leadership skills such as being inclusive and adaptive applied to many situations. Furthermore, we had weekly meetings with our co-counselors to discuss goals for the week, solve problematic situations as a team, and reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of our leadership.

In taking the [Exploring Leadership in the Context of Conference Development](#), I was able to identify my leadership philosophy that focuses on the Shared Leadership Model. I quickly learned the importance of sharing responsibilities amongst members of a team in order to efficiently reach a goal. I practiced this theory in the planning of the Upper Midwest Regional Honors Conference by being a member of the Hospitality Committee. Our team worked together and divvied up tasks in the planning of the social events for the conference. The shared leadership philosophy I developed through this class has become something that I have been able to utilize in following leadership experiences.

My job as a [Primary Outdoor Leader](#) for Wilderness Inquiry was an experience where I could see all my leadership ideas come together. Although it was one of the most challenging experiences I've had, it was also one of the most rewarding. For this job, I worked in the beautiful yet unpredictable outdoors, in rain or shine, from before sunrise to after sunset. It was exhausting work but utterly gratifying. I built strong, lasting relationships between my co-leaders and participants; I took on more responsibilities by becoming a primary leader; and I worked with an inspirational non-profit organization to help people experience the outdoors no matter their background, age or ability. As an outdoor leader, I was part of a team working towards the goal of making sure every participant had a fun and safe experience. Our team frequently discussed logistics and safety concerns, delegated tasks so that each trip operated smoothly, and reflected upon the ups and downs of our experiences and our leadership strengths and weaknesses. Overall, my role as a Primary Leader supports my belief in the importance of forming relationships in leadership and my philosophy of shared leadership. I plan to use implement ideas in my future endeavors as I graduate college and enter the professional world.

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Global Citizenship

Prior to coming to college, I didn't fully grasp the concept of being a global citizen. I neither really thought deeply about the subject nor understood the importance of being globally competent. Throughout my last 3.5 years of college and work experience, I quickly learned that the ability to be culturally competent is a lot more complex and meaningful than I originally thought.

My experience with cultural competency began in high school by taking Spanish language classes all four years. I extended my learning of the language by completing the [Spanish 201](#) course in college. The experience and knowledge that I attained through these classes not only allowed me to learn and practice a second language but also to better understand cultures that are very different than my own. Although it was very difficult learning to read, write, and speak Spanish even at a basic level, I have developed a great appreciation for the language and culture.

Taking the course [GEOG103](#): Introduction to Cultural Geography was a huge stepping stone for me to understand many of the cultures around the world. Even though the course only gave me a small glimpse of the many languages, religions, and cultural perspectives from around the globe, it sparked my interest and curiosity to learn more about cultures other than my own. This course helped me realize just how huge our world is with so many people of different languages and backgrounds. For this reason, I learned that it is so important to be open-minded and understanding of other cultures and their perspectives.

In the course [FILM334W](#): International Film I learned about how a country's culture and history influences the style and content of their films. I was able to learn about the culture and history of several different influential film-making countries by watching and discussing several international films over the course of the semester. Through discussions and essays, I compared and contrasted the cultural differences between international films and the typical Hollywood films that most Americans are familiar with. Through this class I not only gained a better understanding of cultures from around the world but also a genuine interest learning more about other cultures.

One of my most profound cultural experiences occurred when I was working as an [Outdoor Guide](#) for Wilderness Inquiry. A big part of Wilderness Inquiry's mission is to bringing people of differing backgrounds, ages, and abilities together to experience the outdoors. As a kayaking and camping guide, I had participants on my trips that had a wide range of physical and/or cognitive disabilities, or what we liked to call 'different abilities.' Although it could be challenging at times, I learned how to work and communicate with these participants in order for them to have all their needs met and also have a fun time. The variety of perspectives that our diverse participants brought to the table made each and every trip a learning experience. Through this experience I became aware that I don't need to travel to another country to encounter other cultures. There is a vast array of culture all around us to experience and learn from. Overall, I have found that becoming a Global Citizen is an ongoing learning experience. Cultural competence is more than just knowing how to speak a language. It also involves understanding, respecting, and being willing to learn about different cultural perspectives.

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Research

As a freshman in the Honors Program here at Minnesota State University, Mankato, research was the component of the program that concerned me the most. The idea of coming up with my own project and finding the means to carry out the research, especially when I didn't really understand what a research project even was, seemed so complicated. It turned out that with my major in Ecology, research came naturally.

A crucial part of being a successful researcher is having information literacy skills. My first experience with research took place my first semester in [BIOL105: General Biology 1](#). In this class I learned how to find reliable sources such as books and peer-reviewed papers and cite them in-text. I had to learn to deviate from the 'easy way' of finding information via google searches, and I became familiar with using databases to access more credible data. I also learned how to structure a scientific paper through the process of writing a scientific paper called, "Factors that Influence the Rate of Photosynthesis." I used data from a lab experiment conducted in class and information from texts and scientific papers in the construction of this report.

In a course called [BIOL403: Conservation Biology](#), I practiced information literacy and information synthesis. A big project in this class was to compile data on an endangered species for an online species database called Animal Diversity Web. I searched for and gathered information on a species of fish called a weed shiner, and I organized the data onto a template for the website. This project allowed me to help provide information on a species of concern so that others can learn about a lesser known species. Once again, the importance of finding and organizing credible information was relevant in this project.

Two courses, [BIOL442: Flora of Minnesota](#) and [BIOL410: Global Change Biology](#), gave me valuable experience in compiling and organizing data on an original topic. In Global Change, I took part in creating a 50-minute group presentation of the impacts of deforestation of the Amazon Rainforest on climate change. This project gave me useful practice conducting research in a team setting. It was important to be organized and communicate clearly in order to produce a quality project. Similarly, I constructed a presentation about a specific plant family in the Flora of Minnesota course. I practiced my skills searching for and analyzing data, compiling and organizing the data on a PowerPoint, and presenting that information to the class. This course also provided me an opportunity to collect original data in the form of plant samples. I was able to identify, press, and mount plants that I collected, and now they are stored in the Herbarium on campus for others to use and learn from.

This last summer I had the amazing opportunity to work as an [aquatic vegetation intern](#) with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. This position gave me substantial experience learning about and taking part in primary research. My main role was to help the aquatic vegetation specialist, Eric, carry out the seasonal field work for the vegetation surveys that are part of the Long Term Resource Monitoring (LTRM) program of the Upper Mississippi River. I obtained original data by sampling 450 randomly chosen sites and identifying the species and measuring density and biomass. My role as an aquatic vegetation intern gave me valuable experience conducting research with a state agency that has been carrying out this project for over two decades. I not only realized the importance of quality research methods and detail orientation, but I also discovered my interest in doing more research in the future. Because I am graduating this fall, my outlets for disseminating this research was limited. Therefore, after meeting with Dr. Dahlman, I have presented my research experience to an Honors First Year Experience class.